

Love Never Dies

by Tiger5913

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Summary: After the fight with Sephiroth, Cloud goes to the City of the Ancients. Following that, his birthday takes place, and then he is entangled in a situation where he's fighting for the will of his heart. Spoilers for the end of disk 1. Cloud x Aeris

1. Default Chapter Title

Body

****Christi Lin

3/30/00

(my first story ever)

** **Final Fantasy VII: Love never dies ****

Prologue

A dark room materialized before him. A young woman hovered in front of him and he stared at her, feeling paralyzed. _No, it can't be _He thought.

"Cloud" The woman whispered softly. "Help me, please"

He opened his mouth to reply, but just then, her gorgeous face disappeared as a hand grabbed her abdomen, yanking her roughly away.

"Aeris! No!" He cried and made a wild grab for her arm, but missed!

He ran after the woman and her kidnapper, watching her as she looked

at him with a fearful expression on her face.

Suddenly, she vanished!

He collapsed to one knee. "No, not again" He murmured, his heart in pain.

"Aer-ris!"

Cloud Strife screamed and woke up. Drops of sweat dripped down slowly from his blonde bangs as he breathed heavily. He closed his eyes and tried to slow his heartbeat. "Aeris" He moaned. _She's got to be alive, she's just got to be _Cloud thought.

The blonde hair, blue eyed, 21-year old brushed his hair away and rose from his bed. He quickly dressed in his usual outfit of a thick, dark blue sleeveless turtleneck, navy colored pants, slipped on tan boots, and pulled on gray gloves.

Cloud picked up the flowers he had come across in the Sleeping Forest. _Guess I'll visit her a little earlier_ He sighed.

After the whole escapade with Sephiroth, a man who was trying to destroy Cloud and his friends' planet, everyone had gone his or her separate ways. Barret Wallace and his daughter, Marlene went to Elmyra's house in Midgar, and Yuffie Kisaragi and Vincent Valentine (her boyfriend), traveled back to Yuffie's hometown, Wutai. Cait Sith had gone back to the Gold Saucer, Nanaki (RedXIII) went to his birthplace, Cosmo Canyon, and Tifa Lockheart went to her and Cloud's hometown, Nibelheim. Cid flew his airship, the Highwind, back to Rocket Town and to his wife, Shera. Cloud had gone to the City of the Ancients to visit Aeris Gainsborough, a flower merchant he had met a while back, and fell in love with, one last time.

Cloud walked out of the seashell-shaped house and ran down a path. He slowed down as he neared Aeris' watery grave

Cloud knelt down at the edge of the small pond and gently set the flowers down on the surface of the water. He stood up and slowly walked away; his heart feeling heavy and his mind deep in thought.

A tear from Cloud's eye dropped onto his closed fist as he remembered

__A few months before

Cloud watched as Aeris bent down to her knees, near the front of a small, glass dome. Her head was down and her hands were locked together in prayer.

_He approached her carefully, cautiously, afraid of his actions. _Aeris looks so angelic _He thought._ I wonder why she's praying?__

__As Cloud got closer to the Aeris, he began to freak out as Sephiroth manipulated his mind; forcing him to pull out his sword and raise it over the Ancient (Aeris). Barret and Yuffie managed to stop Cloud before he struck her, but they couldn't stop Sephiroth._

The silver haired, green eyed, former SOLDIER flew down from above with lightning fast speed and stabbed Aeris through her stomach. Cloud cringed as her lifeless body lurched toward the floor

__God, I can't believe I'll never know what Aeris was talking about on our date__

A week before Aeris' murder

__"Cloud" Aeris said quietly to him.

"?" He wondered.

__ _"I want to meet you"__

Cloud was confused. "But I'm right here." He reminded her.

"(I know, I know) But I what mean is I want to meet you."

__I didn't even get the chance to tell her that I-__

__ A soft splash interrupted his thoughts. Cloud twisted his body around and instinctively reached for his Ultima sword. He looked around for a moment, but didn't see anything but trees and the ripples in the pond.

Ripples in the water? Cloud stepped forward and peered into the water.

Suddenly, he felt a tap on his shoulder, whirled around, and let out a small gasp.

Standing in front of him was a very familiar woman. She was dripping wet, but didn't look like she had aged a single day since the last time Cloud had seen her.

The woman had silky, waist-length, dark brown hair tied with a pink ribbon. She was clothed in a long, pale pink dress, a small red vest as an overcoat, and wore brown boots.

She smiled wryly and said, "Looking for me?"

"A-Aeris" Cloud stuttered. "What are you doing here??"

"You don't want to see me?"

"No, of course I want to!" He told her firmly. "But I thought I saw you"

"Die?" She finished. Cloud could see a glimmer of sadness in Aeris' eyes.

"I did die," She finally said. "But afterwards, I saw- Umm, I mean, this guy Oh, it's a long story" Aeris trailed off and shivered from a sudden gust of wind.

Cloud noticed. "You cold?"

"A little."

He held out his hand to her. "Come on, I know a place where we can talk."

Aeris slipped her moist hand into his dry one and took a few steps, but stumbled to her knees.

"Sorry, my legs feel kind of numb from the water." She looked at Cloud apologetically.

"It's all right." He assured her. "I'll carry you."

"No, I don't want to be a bother" Aeris protested.

"You'll never be a bother to me." He smiled at her and swept her in his arms effortlessly, one hand supporting her back and the other holding up her legs. Aeris wrapped her arms around his neck as he started back down the path.

When the two arrived at the seashell house, Cloud set Aeris down on one of the beds and wrapped her in a blanket.

"Thank you." She smiled.

"No problem." Cloud answered.

"So, what did you want to know?" Aeris asked.

Cloud hesitated. "Can you tell me what happened to you after Sephiroth killed you?"

The Cetra got a faraway look in her eyes as she started to explain.

"I'm not exactly sure what happened, but I remember somehow ending up in a cloudy place. It turned out to be the Promised Land"

Aeris paused and smiled as Cloud held her hand, then continued.

"The people there seemed so happy and joyous I looked around for a while, then a man came up to me and said, 'Welcome Aeris, to the environment of pure-souled and kind hearted people.' I felt a little weird out; I'd never seen him before, after all, and he already knew my name!"

Cloud asked gently, "Did you find out who he was?"

Aeris shook her head. "No. But the man helped me for some reason"

"I stayed there for a few weeks, but felt miserable and a little lonely. Many people there were nice, but something was still missing. A few days later, the man came up to me again said, 'You do not have to stay here if you are not happy. You can go back to the Planet back to your loved one'"

"I was speechless. The man must have seen the slightly confused, but weary expression on my face, because he then said, 'Do not worry, you can trust me. I will not deceive you.'"

"He stirred my curiosity, so I asked him how I could go back; he got a sad look in his eyes and replied, 'You died too young, Aeris Gainsborough. I will give you another chance. However, as soon you return to the Planet, you must be careful, for there is someone searching for you, and may be more troublesome than your last opponent'

"Before I could say anything else, he waved good-bye and everything exploded in a bright white light The next thing I knew, I was cold, and lying in icy, blue water. Then I saw you." Aeris finished. She looked at Cloud, curiously. "What do you think of this?" The Cetra asked.

A long, silent moment passed before he finally said, "Whether or not that man was telling the truth, I'll protect you." Cloud met her eyes. "I lost you once, I'm not losing you again." He said hoarsely.

"Oh Cloud" Aeris said softly. "I'm sorry to bring this so sudden to you, but I'm pretty sure we have someone new to deal with."

Cloud took out his sword and swung it around above his head confidently. "Then let him or her try."

Aeris chuckled, then smiled as her boyfriend enveloped her in a warm hug. He whispered into her ear, "I never got the chance to tell you this, but I love you"

She stiffened. "What about Tifa?"

"What ****about**** her?"

"Aren't you two"

"Together? No, she'll always be just a sister to me."

Aeris sighed, relieved. "Everything's fine then"

Cloud turned his face and kissed her on the nose. She smiled and said, teasingly, "You missed."

He smiled back, cupped her face in his hands and slowly lowered his lips to hers, kissing her gently.

"Hey, want to go talk to the others?" Aeris suggested.

"Alright, if you're up for it." Cloud reached into his pocket and pulled out his PHS (a phone). They're sure going to be in for a big surprise" He murmured happily to himself before he dialed.

A couple of hours later, all of their old friends and allies arrived at the City of the Ancients. None of them were prepared to see Aeris sitting calmly with Cloud in a chair, smiling knowingly at each other when they saw the shocked expressions on their friends' faces.

Yuffie broke the silence by exclaiming, "A-Aeris? Is that really you??" The young ninja choked back a sob and ran to Aeris, hugging her tightly. Barret was speechless for once, and his daughter, Marlene skipped to Aeris shrieking excitedly, "It's the flower lady,

it's the flower lady!" Tifa was glad to see Aeris, but felt secretly disappointed. Nanaki howled happily to the ceiling, and even Vincent's usually expressionless face showed some sort of surprised look. Cid scratched his head, unsure of what to say.

After a while, Cloud pried Yuffie and Marlene away from Aeris and sat everyone down.

"I guess you all want an explanation?" He shrugged and grinned. They all laughed and listened eagerly to Aeris as she explained what happened to her. Cloud sat down beside her as she began

Epilogue

Outside in the freezing weather, a figure peered into the window, eyeing the 10 friends sitting around together, sneering at the sight of the group's bright and optimistic attitudes.

"Enjoy your happiness now; it won't last for long" The figure laughed wickedly and her eyes glowed a dark blood red color

****The Endor is it?****

2. Default Chapter Title

Body

February 28th, 2000

Final Fantasy VII: Once interrupted by fireworks

****By Tiger5913 (Christi)

**** "Done!"

A flower merchant stood up and proudly admired her work. The colorful garden in front of her glittered with water, and sparkled in the bright yellow sunrays. Daffodils and sunflowers wavered in the wind. The woman bent down to her knees and stroked the petals of a carnation with a pale pink color like her dress, then checked the moisture of the dirt around other flowers.

A hand holding a tall, red rose appeared next to her shoulder. The 22-year-old beautiful young woman smiled, knowing full well who it was. It was August the 19th. There's the birthday boy She thought, smiling. The woman turned around and took the rose gingerly.

"Thanks Cloud." She looked up at him.

Cloud Strife brushed his long blonde bangs back and grinned bashfully. The 22-year-old, five feet, seven-inched ex-Shinra soldier

glanced at the flowers and let out a low whistle at the scenery around him.

"Welcome. How's the gardening going?" The young man crouched down beside her.

Aeris Gainsborough stood up and sighed with a slight sign of tiredness.

"I can't believe that I finished so early! I thought it'd take months to grow all these flowers. Guess they grow pretty easily here," She said with astonishment. "By the way, do you have any plans for today?"

"Not much happening today." _Except for my birthday Geez, I'm the same age as Aeris now_ Cloud thought to himself as he got up as well.

"Want to go to Gold Saucer?" Aeris asked.

"Sure, why not?" He replied.

"Let's invite everyone to come along, k?" She asked.

"Alright. You ready to go?"

"Give me a minute."

The Ancient tended to her flowers one last time; then, she and Cloud held hands and walked back to their house in the Icicle Inn, Aeris's birthplace. They had moved there after Cloud found Aeris in the City of the Ancients. Aeris had wanted to live in Icicle Inn at the home that belonged to her Cetra mother years before. Cloud obliged, feeling happy just being with his girlfriend who had suffered a tragic death, but was revived again, thanks to the help of a mysterious man. Cloud felt grateful to the man, even though he didn't know who that guy was.

When the couple had arrived, Aeris went inside to get the GP that Cloud had left over from the last time he had gone to Gold Saucer. Cloud stayed outside and used his PHS to inform all of his and Aeris's friends. By the time she had gotten the GP and was outside again, he had finished calling.

"Everyone can go, except for Reeve, Barret, and Nanaki. Reeve's still working on the ruins in Midgar, Nanaki is taking over Bugenhagen's place as leader of Cosmo Canyon, and Barret says he's spending time with Marlene. Cid said that he's coming over in the Highwind with Yuffie, Vincent, and Tifa." Cloud told her.

"Okay, hope he'll be here soon!" Aeris walked out of Icicle Inn to wait. Cloud followed her.

A few minutes later, they saw the tan-colored airship land in the small grassy area nearby. The pilot, Cid Highwind, stepped out onto a rail, let down a rope ladder, and waved the two over. Cloud and Aeris rushed to the Highwind, and climbed up the ladder.

"Hey you two! Hope ya don't mind, but I bought Shera along!" Cid informed them.

Cloud shrugged. "No problem."

"Hi Cid," Aeris said. "Where is everyone?"

"In the Operation Room." He told her.

"Okay, thanks!" With that, she took Cloud's arm and pulled him down the stairs. The mechanical doors to the Operation Room slid open as they went into the room. Yuffie Kisaragi, Vincent Valentine, Tifa Lockheart, and Shera Highwind were sitting in the chairs around the table; chatting amongst themselves until they spotted Cloud and Aeris enter the room.

"Hi! You're here!" Yuffie jumped up from her seat and gave Aeris a hug. She waved to Cloud.

"Cloud!" Tifa exclaimed and gave him a hug, completely ignoring Aeris.

Vincent shook Cloud's hand and nodded a greeting to Aeris.

Aeris raised her eyebrow at Tifa, but chuckled at her 'little sister' (Yuffie)'s excitement. She noticed that the ninja from Wutai had grown taller and was quickly catching up to Aeris's five feet, five-inched figure. Yuffie was now a pretty 16-year-old teenager with dark black hair, and forest green eyes, wearing a green sleeveless turtleneck, and white short shorts.

Cloud pried Tifa off of him and pulled up a seat for Aeris, then sat down himself. The group talked about their old experiences until they arrived at Gold Saucer.

"Wow, this place has changed!" Aeris exclaimed as she got off the train at the Ropeway Station, her eyes widening as the sight of the golden amusement park towering over her. Cloud, Yuffie, Vincent, and Tifa got off and followed Aeris as she ran through the entrance. Cid and Shera had gone back to Rocket Town, due to an emergency call Cid had gotten, but he told his friends to call when they were ready to leave. "Have a great time!" The girl next to the entrance yelled as the group ran by.

When the friends had caught up to Aeris, they all looked at the schedule, talked with each other, and decided to split up. Yuffie and Vincent jumped down a tube, heading for the Battle Arena. Cloud and Aeris went to Wonder Square, with Tifa tagging along. The three hopped into their tube.

Wonder Square looked really different! There were tons of new arcade games, Cloud, Aeris, and Tifa discovered as they sprinted up the stairs and into the game rooms.

"Cloud, look at this one!" Aeris tugged him over to a new game called Ghost Shootout. The game was on a huge machine that had a big picture of a haunted house in the background. There were also two plastic guns in holsters located to the side of the game. While Aeris was examining the game, Tifa grabbed Cloud's arm and tried to lure Cloud into the other game room. Cloud shook her hand off and went back to Aeris. Miffed, Tifa followed him.

"You wanna play?" Cloud asked her.

"Sure!" She grabbed a gun and pretended to cock back the gun to reload, winking at Cloud. Her boyfriend dropped some GP into the machine, took the other gun, and pushed the Start button. The two waited as ghosts slowly appeared on the screen. Cloud and Aeris took careful aim, and shot each one until they disappeared, and had won the game. A hundred GP dropped out from the machine. Cloud took the GP and gave half of them to Aeris.

Cloud went to the other room to play the snowboarding game. Aeris stayed behind and tried the 3-D fighting. Tifa ran to Cloud, bugging him all throughout the game, causing him to lose. After Aeris was done, she collected her GP prize and went to watch Cloud. When he got his score and some gil, Aeris turned to him.

"Cloud, where to-" She started to ask.

"Cloud, do you want to go on the Gondola Ride?" Tifa interrupted.

Aeris glanced at the 20-year-old woman, feeling a little irritated. Cloud sensed her mood.

"Uh, no thanks Tifa" He refused. Tifa frowned and folded her arms across her huge chest poutingly. Aeris secretly mouthed a thank-you to Cloud.

"Hey, why don't we go watch how Yuffie and Vincent are doing in the Battle Arena?" Aeris suggested.

"Yeah, let's watch how badly they're losing" Cloud chuckled and Aeris giggled. The couple grabbed each other's hands and ran down the stairs out of Wonder Square. Tifa ran after them, and the three jumped into the tube leading to the Battle Arena.

"Ow! Hey, watch it!"

Yuffie glanced at the cut on her leg and glared at her opponent. _You're gonna pay for that_ She thought.

She gripped her Conformer tightly and then threw it at the enemy, one of the Unknowns from the crashed Shinra plane. The ugly, floating, pink monster stared at Yuffie with all of its four eyes, its wings flapping swiftly and its tail pointing menacingly at Yuffie. Not noticing that it was bleeding, the monster launched Bolt2 on her. She dodged the attack, and countered with her mastered Contain materia: Tornado magic. The creature shrank back after a wicked wind tore it around in the air.

Yuffie took the distraction to her advantage and threw her Conformer at the enemy one last time. Success! The Unknown wheezed and collapsed to the floor. Yuffie twirled around joyfully and jumped up and down. She skipped out of the Arena and the girl at the counter greeted her with, "Congratulations! For winning the special personal battle, you get 1,000 BP and an X-Potion!"

Yuffie collected her prize and grinned at the girl. The Battle Arena hadn't changed much, except for the new personal battle, where one person enters the Arena and fights just one opponent. Whoever fell

first lost the match. Yuffie smiled at her victory. She headed for the BP exchange machines and was surprised to see that not only Vincent was there, but also Cloud, Aeris, and Tifa!

"Hi guys! Done already?" She asked Cloud and Aeris.

"Yeah, we wanted to see how you were doing." Aeris replied with a smile.

"Uh huh, we wanted to see how bad you were losing." Cloud winked at Yuffie.

Tifa yawned loudly. "I'm tired. You guys think we can stay the night here and ask Cid to pick us up tomorrow?"

"I don't think he'd care. He did say that we should call when we want to go-" Vincent started.

"And we don't want to go yet!" Yuffie finished for him.

"To the Ghost Hotel then?" Aeris inquired.

"Where else?" Cloud grinned. "Let's turn in."

He took her arm and they ran into the tube outside of the Battle Arena. Yuffie exchanged her 1,000 BP for a Pre-emptive Materia then took Vincent's hand and after followed Cloud and Aeris. Tifa frowned with jealousy at being left out. _That stupid little flower loving bitch!_ She thought angrily. _If she hadn't gotten in my way, Cloud and I would be together!_ Suddenly, she smiled wickedly. _I know a way that he and I can spend some time with each other After Ms. Perfect, Aeris, goes to sleep, I'll ask Cloud out!_

With that thought in mind, Tifa trailed after them, sticking her nose high in the air.

At the Ghost Hotel, Aeris and Yuffie went upstairs to their room to sleep while Cloud and Vincent stayed downstairs for a while. Tifa walked by the two guys, flashing Cloud a flirty smile as she climbed the stairs to her own room. After she left, Cloud ran a hand through his hair.

"What's up with her these days?" He turned toward Vincent.

"Tifa's jealous." Vincent answered matter-of-factly.

Cloud had a confused expression on his face. "Why? About what?"

His friend raised an eyebrow. "Why do you think?"

"If it's because of Aeris again, I swear" Cloud mumbled. "Geez, Tifa's really changed since we were children. I remember us hanging out just a couple of years ago, and now she acts like this!" He shook his spikey-haired head slowly and pitifully.

"Tifa only acted nice to you; she was a real manipulative ball-and-chain to the rest of us during the Sephiroth episode." Vincent informed. "I think you should forget her, she's too fake. Stay with Aeris, you two make a great couple." He advised.

Cloud glanced at his black haired friend. His dark red eyes told Cloud that what he was saying was true.

"Whatever happens, I'm never going to leave Aeris." Cloud told Vincent firmly. "I-I've liked her from the start; I hope she knows that I won't ever break her heart."

Vincent nodded with understanding. He smiled slightly.

"What about you and Yuffie?" The ex-soldier asked.

He sighed. "I don't know. I'm kind of new at this. The only person I've had feelings for were Lucrecia and you know how ****that**** turned out."

Cloud's eyes fell to the floor. "Sorry, I just wanted to know"

"It's okay."

"Need any advice?"

Vincent shrugged. "I've got nothing to lose."

"Be honest with Yuffie, tell her how you feel. She's got a good head on her shoulders, even though she doesn't act that way sometimes Why don't you ask her out somewhere and tell her?"

"Thanks, I'll try that." He looked at the clock. "It's getting late, I'm going to sleep."

"Same here." Cloud yawned. "Night Vince."

"Good night Cloud."

The two young men walked up the stairs and went their separate ways. Cloud retired to his room and strode around in circles, his mind deep in thought.

Knock knock!

__ Cloud's eyes shifted to the door. _Could that be Aeris? _He wondered. He walked up to the door, smiled, and swung it open quietly.

It wasn't Aeris.

"Tifa!" He exclaimed, disappointment drawling in his voice.

Unnoticing, the brown haired woman slid past Cloud and sat down on his bed.

Cloud opened his mouth to ask her if she could leave, but before he could, Tifa blurted out, "Hey, wanna sneak out and spend some time together?"

Aeris giggled and snuck out of her and Yuffie's room. _Wonder if Cloud knows how to dance?_ She wondered. Aeris walked lightly down

the hall and was about to go into Cloud's room when she noticed two shadows inside. She peeked in and saw who was with Cloud.

Tifa! She thought. _Honestly Why is she still chasing after Cloud? She must not be over him _Aeris shook her head, feeling sorry for Tifa, even though Aeris knew she wasn't up to any good. She stayed in the hall and tried to find out what Tifa was doing in her boyfriend's room so late at night.

Cloud frowned. "Tifa, you know about me and Aeris-"

Tifa interrupted him, "Oh come on, you're not serious."

"Yes I am, Tifa." Cloud was starting to get irritated.

She ignored the remark. "Ya know, all of our friends say that you and I make a better couple."

"Who says?" He crossed his arms across his chest.

"Johnny, my mother before she died Also, my dad had always said we cute together. Besides, you promised"

Cloud was really getting annoyed. He grabbed her arm and forced her to look at him.

"Tifa, I already kept my promise! I saved you twice, remember?"

"But Cloud, you and Aeris are as different as night and day! Besides, who wants to be the boyfriend of a weak fighter and emotional roller coaster like her?"

_Now _that's_ the icing on the cake!_ Tifa thought with a smirk.

Now Cloud was pissed. "Tifa Lockheart, don't you dare called Aeris that. I love and care a lot about her, so stop criticizing her! Also, the only reason I made that promise to you was because I knew that you wouldn't stop bugging me if I didn't!" He gritted out coldly. Cloud knew that he probably shouldn't have been so mean to Tifa, but she had really crossed the line, big time.

Tifa reeled back as if she had been hit. She had a hurt look on her face, but it quickly dissolved and turned into anger.

"Just remember this Cloud, Aeris was killed once and she was just lucky that she got a second chance to live. How do you know she won't get killed again?" Tifa hissed. She had a murderous glint in her eye, but reluctantly, she left his room.

Aeris heard footsteps coming toward the door so she ducked behind the wall. Tifa muttered some choice words about Aeris under her breath and turned to go into her room.

The Cetra finally stepped out after a few minutes. She went to

Cloud's room, shutting the door softly behind her. Cloud was sitting on one side of his bed; his back turned to her. Aeris walked up to him and tapped him on the shoulder.

"Aeris!" Cloud was surprised, but glad to see her.

"Cloud, I heard what Tifa said." She admitted.

Cloud put his arms around Aeris and held her tightly.

"Sorry about her coming here I honestly had no idea. About what she said, don't worry, I won't let anything happen to you. Do you trust me?" He looked into her worried emerald eyes.

"Of course, bodyguard" Aeris winked. "I'm just worried that I'm getting in the way. What if you two were meant to be?"

"Aeris, if destiny wanted to put me and Tifa together, it had an awful lot of chances! We did know each other since we were kids, but nothing ever happened. Why would they now?" Cloud pulled back and kissed her on the forehead.

"Thanks Cloud" Aeris smiled.

"Hey, what were you wandering around for? Did you need to talk to me?" Cloud asked.

"Does this sound familiar: 'Let's go on a date!'" Aeris chuckled.

_Yeah, except that the first time you asked me, I was too stunned to say anything. _The ex-soldier thought to himself.

"Sure." He answered.

"Alright, but first, you have to put on something nice" Aeris handed him a small pack. "I'll leave while you change. Come get me in my room after you're done. Hurry, okay?" She left the room.

Mystified, Cloud shrugged and unzipped the bag. There was a black suit inside. _What's this for?_ He wondered. _Hmmm, oh well, I trust Aeris._

Cloud changed and went to Aeris's room. He knocked on her door and whispered, "Aeris? Are you there? Yuffie?"

The door opened and Yuffie came out dressed in a stunning, light blue, short dress. Her hair was tied in a bun and she was wearing a touch of lipstick. She looked at Cloud, and then quickly bolted down the stairs, and ran out of the Ghost Hotel.

_What the hell? Oh well _Cloud shrugged and pushed the door open. Aeris was sitting on her bed, giggling. Cloud stepped inside.

"Are you ready, Aeris?" He asked.

"Uh huh." She replied.

Aeris got up and 'inspected' Cloud. _He's so cute!_ She thought to herself.

"Well, let's get going!" She took Cloud's hand and they walked out of the Ghost Hotel together. When the two were back at the Station, Aeris lead Cloud to the Event Square tube.

"Aeris, don't tell me you get me to dress up for another play" Cloud teased.

"No way!" She answered.

"Then why did you tell me to?"

She smiled mysteriously. "You'll find out soon enough"

Cloud and Aeris jumped down the tube to Event Square. Cloud was really surprised at how much it had changed! Event Square had gone from a boring, vacant stage to a dark, beautiful ballroom. Colors flashed from the floor and ceiling as lights swung around. Couples were either dancing or sitting at tables talking to each other.

Aeris turned to Cloud and chuckled at the surprised expression on his face. She asked, "Cloud, can you wait a minute? I gotta do something, I'll be right back!" Aeris disappeared into the crowd. Cloud found an empty table and sat down in a chair, waiting for Aeris to come back.

Damn, Gold Saucer has changed a lot! He thought. _Shoulda checked it out earlier_

"Hehe, don't- I only-Aeris." A faint voice to his right said. _Aeris?_ Cloud's ears perked up. He peeked over his right shoulder and saw the back of a very familiar girl She had on a short, light blue dress, white sandals, and her shoulder-length black hair was pinned up in a bun His eyes widened.

It was Yuffie! And sitting next to her was Vincent! _So that's why Yuffie was all dressed up_ Cloud figured out. He watched the two for a moment, hoping that Vincent was taking the advice he had given him, and wished him luck.

Yuffie was laughing at something and Cloud saw Vincent then holding her hand. He saw him say a few words to Yuffie. Cloud watched her face for any signs of emotion. She looked calm and understanding.

"Eavesdropping, Cloud?" A voice behind him giggled.

Cloud dragged his eyes away from his friends, turned around and gasped.

Aeris was standing in front of him, looking absolutely drop-dead gorgeous. She had on a beautiful, long, silky, spaghetti-strapped dress that was marooned colored; the dress showed off her figure perfectly. Her auburn hair was tied up in a long ponytail with a rose red ribbon and her eyelids were blushed with pale green eye shadow. Her lips were colored with dark red lipstick the light brown sandals she was wearing was petite and cute.

Cloud gawked for a moment until Aeris felt her hair self-consciously.

"Cloud, what's wrong? Do I look okay?" She asked nervously.

_Okay?? Aeris looks beautiful! _Cloud thought to himself.

"You look wonderful!" He finally assured her. Cloud took her hand and gently kissed it.

"May I have this dance?" He smiled.

"Well, how can I refuse an invitation like that?" Aeris teased. "Of course you can." She said with a serious look on her face, but then she grinned at him.

Cloud led Aeris to the dance floor and put his arms around her waist gently as she linked her hands around his neck. The two swayed slowly to the music, unaware of the time passing by. At one point, Cloud noticed Yuffie and Vincent also dancing. He nudged Aeris.

"They're so cute together" Aeris murmured softly, a small happy smile forming on her lips. Then her attention shifted back to Cloud; she closed her eyes and laid her head on his chest, her arms wrapping around his back. Cloud glanced at Yuffie and Vincent one last time, surprised to see them kissing, and placed his head on gently on the top of Aeris's.

An hour rolled by; Cloud and Aeris danced the whole time to the soft, slow music, not noticing as some of the people at the dance began to leave, including Yuffie and Vincent. Cloud and Aeris finally parted and looked at each other for a few minutes. The Ancient smiled mischievously.

"Cloud, wanna go on the Gondola?" She asked.

"Okay, why not?"

The couple walked slowly together toward the Round Square, still dressed in their dance clothes. Before they got on the ride, Cloud handed the girl at the ticket booth 10 GP.

"Oh, it's alright. I've seen you two before, I think you make an awesome pair." The girl winked at them.

"Thanks." Aeris told her.

She stepped into the little tram and Cloud followed her in and sat next to her.

** **_At least I get to sit _with_ her this time instead of across from her_ Cloud thought.** **

Their car jerked to a start and Aeris automatically looked out the window at the sights of Gold Saucer. Cloud leaned toward her, placing his arm around her and peered out the window from behind her shoulders.

The night sky blanketed Gold Saucer with black shadow, but the cheery, flashing colors lit up the dark skies, the lights slicing through the gray clouds. The stars sparkled, their whiteness glowing

as bright as Aeris's crystal emerald eyes of her peaceful and joyous mood.

Chocobos darted nearby the window that Cloud and Aeris were looking out of and an illusion of a UFO floated around their tram, high-pitched noises squeaking out of it. Fireworks flew through the air, interesting designs appearing as the fireworks blew up in the sky. Aeris sighed at the wondrous scenery, laying her head on Cloud's arm as more fireworks colored the dark night.

A little while before the ride was over, the Cetra turned to Cloud and hugged him tightly.

"I love you, Cloud Strife." She said softly to him.

"I love you too, Aeris Gainsborough." He whispered.

"And Happy Birthday also" Aeris said.

"You remembered?" Cloud asked.

"Of course! I wouldn't forget my own boyfriend's birthday, would I? The real question is: have you forgotten mine?" She smiled and winked playfully.

Cloud laughed. "I'd forget my own birthday before I forget yours" He stroked Aeris' hair gently.

The car slowed to a stop and the couple strolled out, walking step-in-step together, the girl grinning at the sight of the two. They snuck back into the Ghost Hotel and crept quietly up the stairs. Cloud walked Aeris to her room. She opened the door slowly, and turned back around.

"Good night" She said softly.

Cloud placed one arm around Aeris and the other gently on in her hair. He brushed her lips with his, gently at first, then more passionately. She wrapped her arms around him and returned his kiss. They broke apart a few moments later, and Aeris smiled dreamily and waved to Cloud slowly as she slipped into her room, shutting the door softly behind her.

Cloud went into his room as well, plopping down on his bed, sighing with happiness.

_I'll never leave Aeris. _He thought._ I'll protect her from enemies or anyone who wants to harm her, even if the person is Tifa_ Cloud frowned bitterly at the memory of the fight he had earlier with his childhood friend. _ Vincent was right about Tifa. What's her problem anyway? _He wondered.

Cloud changed and slipped into his bed. He yawned and closed his eyes, his mind dreaming of Aeris

A figure's blood red eyes glowed intently in the darkness. She flipped back her ebony black hair and cackled evilly at the ex-soldier sleeping calmly in his bed, his spikey blonde hair bobbing

in front of his forehead. The woman narrowed her ears and whispered quietly into the air, "Do not worry, my dear brother. The right time to strike is now"

****The End****

****Author's note****: Readers don't worry, this isn't really the end! Hey, the enemy hasn't been revealed yet, so stay tuned for part 3! Anyway, I hope you enjoyed my story, and please send any comments or questions about this fanfic to me at , thanks!

3. Default Chapter Title

Body

6/16/00

****Final Fantasy VII: Purity, White as Snow****

*******By Tiger5913****

"Chirp, chirp, chirp!"

The soft squawking noises of early winter birds stirred the auburn hair, beautiful young woman with auburn hair. A breeze blew in from the open window and ruffled up her long brown bangs. Slowly blinking her eyes open, she yawned and lazily stretched her arms above her head. The woman sat up, her bangs dangling in front of her eyes and her long, silky hair tumbling onto her back. Sunrays caught her room and brightened it with golden light. She yawned again and decided to get up.

What a beautiful day She thought to herself.

A smile slowly formed over the female's lips as she strained her ears, listening for any sounds of her significant other. Hearing nothing but silence, she slipped out of her bed. The woman went to one of the vases on her nightstand and gently touched one of the soft flower petals. Satisfied, she smiled and opened the door leading into the hallway. Her soft, cotton nightgown swirled around her legs as she quietly walked out of her sleeping quarters.

The woman sneaked across the narrow hallway and stopped to admire other flowers that were spread out in various colored vases, before creeping immodestly into another room. Her pleasant facial features softened as her gaze settled upon the sleeping figure lying upon the bed. She went over to the lightly breathing young man and knelt beside him.

Grinning at his unawareness of her presence, the woman brought her head down to his pillow. Facing in the direction of his face, she lightly blew away the spiky blonde bangs that were hanging over the man's forehead. Not getting a single response from him, the woman

pouted playfully, then smiled again and tugged gently on a few strands of his long bangs. He stayed still; she shook him softly.

"Hey, wake up" She said quietly.

Silence.

The flower girl sighed and turned her face away. She sat back on the floor, her head resting on her arm, where she had rested upon the side of the bed, thinking about how she should awaken her dead-asleep boyfriend.

Unknowing to her, the young man's eyes sprang open. Snickering lightly, he rose his head up and brought it over to the side of the bed. He glanced down at the pondering girl with cool Mako blue eyes and smiled at her.

Bringing his head back and quietly sitting up, the man leaned over the side and held out his fingers. A grin spread over his face and he quickly dug his fingers under his girlfriend's arms, ticking her.

"Ahhh!" She cried out in surprise.

Her boyfriend let out a laugh, unable to hold it in any longer. The woman turned her face toward him and she gave him a playful stern look.

"Cloud, you rat!" She shrieked.

Cloud Strife retracted his fingers and laughed again, his hands holding his stomach.

"You were awake all this time, weren't you?" His girlfriend accused.

He brought his laughing down to quiet chuckling and managed to nod.

Aeris Gainsborough sprang up from her sitting position and folded her arms across her chest; she glared at her boyfriend.

"Aw, come on. I didn't mean to scare you or anything." Cloud said seriously. He clasped his hands together and made a sad, puppy dog face. "Forgive me?"

Aeris' glare crumpled into a small smile. She shook her head and smiled at him.

"I can never stay mad at you for long," She told him. "What's wrong with me?" Aeris grinned teasingly.

> "Because you can't fight my charm," Cloud put his nose high in the air with fake snobbery.

She giggled. "Yeah, right! Anyway, good morning. I wanted to come in here today and surprise you."

"Well, thank you very much. Although, ****you**** ended up getting the surprise!" Cloud began to snicker again, and Aeris punched him in

arm.

"Ow, hey!" He protested. "What do you have in that fist, anvils?"

"Teehee" She chuckled. "I just practice punching sometimes. If there's ever a battle, and I didn't bring my Princess Guard, what else do I have to rely on? I'd have to use my natural fighting weapons, right?"

Cloud put up his hands in surrender. "Point proven." The ex-soldier grinned and took Aeris' arm, pulling her closer to him for a good-morning kiss. She smiled and brushed her lips lightly against his, then backed away.

"Get dressed," His girlfriend said. "I'd like to go outside, a fresh blanket of snow fell last night."

"Okay, see you downstairs." He told her. Aeris nodded, opened the door and walked out, leaving him alone in his room.

Cloud stood up and walked to his closet. He looked over his wardrobe with a quick glance, and chose an outfit. As the ex-soldier went back to his bed and dropped his clothes on it, he surprisingly felt a jolt of pain in the back of his head. Cloud rubbed his head, ignored it, and picked up the shirt he was going to put on.

Suddenly, an immense, and what felt like an electrifying shock penetrated the inside of his skull. Cloud grimaced in pain, an uneasy look appearing on his face. He dropped his shirt and stumbled to his knees, gripping the sides of his head with his hands. In frustration, Cloud instinctively banged his head on the wood surface of the floor, closing his eyes as his face scrunched up in an extremely uncomfortable expression.

It only got worse.

The pain pierced the outside and inside of Cloud's head; he felt like it was traveling throughout or around his whole brain. The ex-Shinra soldier opened his mouth in a silent scream. Then, he tried to cry out to Aeris, but couldn't, for some reason. His head felt like it was being unmercifully stabbed multiple times; throbbing and throbbing as the pain grew. Unable to stand it any longer, Cloud finally opened his sky blue eyes and groaned. His gaze darted to the window and he growled inhumanly, his shaking hands slowly retracted from his head.

With absolutely no acknowledgement as to what had happened to her beloved boyfriend, Aeris smiled and crossed the hallway outside her room, after changing out of her baby blue cotton nightgown. Her pale lavender dress were almost touching the steps when she walked downwards, the straps on encircling her shoulder wavering this way and that in her quick movements; the white slippers on her feet making soft squeaky noises. The Cetra brushed her combed hair back from her cheek, and straightened the small, dark purple overcoat she wore on top of her dress.

When Aeris reached the bottom of the stairs, she headed to the

kitchen and prepared the instruments she needed to cook breakfast. She was in a giddy and energetic mood, so she decided to make a special meal for Cloud. The Ancient grabbed a gray pan and two plates from the cabinet, and placed them on top of the counter. She then left the kitchen, and went outside into the backyard.

Aeris approached her garden carefully; she walked around and inspected her colorful, beds of various flowers. She put her hand thoughtfully on her chin, and her body swayed side to side slightly while she was thinking. The Cetra glanced over a small section of her garden, and finally selected a fragile blue rose from the bunch. Gently plucking the rose away from the muddy earth, Aeris lightly stroked a few of the petals. Satisfied, she grinned at it and took the rose inside.

As the flower merchant walked into her house, she went back to the kitchen and set the rose down on the table. Aeris quickly fried up a couple of omelets, and made French toast. After setting them on her and Cloud's plates, she cooked sausages, and spread strawberry cream cheese on two bagels. She washed the pan after cooking, and took a seat at the table. The Cetra sat down on a chair and awaited Cloud's arrival.

A few minutes had passed, and Aeris wondered if he had gone back to sleep or something. She shook her head slightly and chuckled to herself at the thought.

_Maybe Cloud's playing another joke on me? _She pondered with a small smile. _He is such a kidder these days_

Aeris began to wonder where Cloud was, after half an hour had passed since she last saw him. Curious, the Ancient stood up from her seat and walked to the foot of the stairs. She looked up and listened for any sounds, like she previously had in the morning.

_ "Something's not right" _ A feeling from inside informed her.
_ "Someone is in trouble" _

Cloud! She concluded.

The Cetra immediately darted up the stairs, her face in a frown of worry. Her feet made small thundering noises as she ran hurriedly. When she reached the top, she crossed the hallway and went into her boyfriend's room; the sight that greeted Aeris made her gasp in shock; her hand instinctively went up to cover her mouth.

Cloud's room was completely in shambles! His dresser drawers were open; clothes flung all over the place. Brown leather boots were scattered upon the bed and Cloud's special picture of him, Aeris, and all their other friends/allies was on the ground, the glass frame broken. Another picture of Cloud and Aeris in the play, at Gold Saucer and on their first date last year, was thrown into his trashcan. A lamp lay shattered near a wall, and a breeze rushed in through the open window, brushing against Aeris' bare arms and making her shiver.

The Ancient stepped cautiously into the room and inspected the catastrophe. She picked up a few of his belongings and replaced them in the drawers; she retrieved the two picture frames and set them on his nightstand. Aeris cleaned up the broken lamp, carefully dumping

the tiny pieces into the garbage.

Preoccupied with the small adjustments she made to his room, it took a while before she ****really**** noticed the window. Aeris frowned and went over to it. She grasped the two glass frames and pulled them in together. Before she closed it completely, Aeris suddenly spotted deep footprints in the snow outside

She pushed the frames aside and leaned out as far as she could, without falling. The footprints, she noticed, lead out of Icicle Inn; perhaps they went into the Great Glacier? Aeris took a few steps away from the window. She turned and ran out of the room. She went across the hallway and into her own room.

Aeris headed toward her bed and dropped to the floor when she reached it. Her hand slid underneath it, and came in contact with a long, cold rod. She took her hand back out, revealing her Princess Guard. The flower merchant then opened the top drawer on her nightstand, reached in and grabbed her Mystile bangles. After checking to make sure her Materia was still in her weapon and armor, Aeris slipped the Mystile onto her wrists. She left her room after doing so, grabbed her Princess Guard before shutting the door behind her. Then, the Ancient dashed down the stairs, and rushed out of the house.

"Hi Rose!" A few kids greeted her. They looked up from their snowboarding and waved at Aeris. The children of Icicle Inn had nicknamed the Cetra, "Rose" because they all liked the roses that Aeris gave them or sold to their parents. Also, some of the kids had visited the flower merchant's garden before, and liked seeing various colors and shapes of different kinds of roses.

Aeris smiled faintly at them, waved back, and continued running out of her icy hometown. When she got out, she peered closely to the ground as she saw more pairs of footsteps, curling around the mountains and heading southeast. Aeris sighed and went back to her garden to get her gold chocobo.

"Waaaaaark!"

Aeris gripped tightly onto the reins on her chocobo, Baby, tightly and sprinted on ahead. The two traveled directly over the mountain and ran foreword. Aeris held one hand onto Baby's reins, the other hand holding her Princess Guard to her side.

Baby stopped after she had gone over another mountain, and hit a city: the City of the Ancients the place where she had once died The Cetra swallowed nervously at the sight of the place. She shot a quick glance at it, then her emerald green eyes dropped to the ground to search for more tracks. Fortunately, there weren't any she saw that went into the City of the Ancients. Aeris let out a sigh of relief, and suddenly spotted some footprints, which were leading into the Sleeping Forest.

The day grew to noon as the flower merchant got off of Baby and dug into her dress pocket. She took out three Mimett greens, and fed them to her chocobo. Aeris patted Baby gently on her head, lightly stroking her soft golden feathers. She smiled at her chocobo and left her at the area between the Sleeping Forest and the City of the

Ancients.

Aeris held her staff closely behind her and walked slowly into the quiet green forest. As the Ancient followed the deep, muddy prints into the Sleeping Forest, she was grateful that she didn't need a Lunar Harp because of her status. She walked into scenery after scenery, wondering if the tracks would ever end. The trees and shrubs of the forest began to look repetitive. Aeris began to tire of all the Acrophies, Malldancer, and Boundfat enemies she had fought shortly after entering the Sleeping Forest, despite the fact that she was learning more experience in battling.

Just as the Cetra was starting to doubt her hypothesis of Cloud being in the forest, she finally reached an open clearing. Aeris closed her eyes, feeling a little weary. She saw a log near by the entrance and sat down on it, leaning her forehead on her hand. The early December breeze whipped through her tangled hair and the pink ribbon tied around her braid flapped wildly in the wind.

After resting a few minutes, Aeris opened her eyes again and stood up from the log. She walked ahead and brushed her bangs to the sides of her face, one hand loosely holding her Princess Guard. The flower merchant went forward, absentmindedly looking over all the flowers and other plants in the forest. She smiled at the good condition of some, and thought about fixing up the other ruined ones.

The Ancient stopped all of a sudden as twisty vines and tall shrubs blocked her view. There was no action in front of her; Aeris tilted her head to one side, wondering what had gotten her to stop. A strange feeling inside her made the young woman walk over to the side and take cover behind a twisted, gnarled tree. She peered around the trunk and watched for any events to happen.

Surprisingly, the thorny vines unraveled and Cloud came into her sights. He was standing; tranquil blue eyes focused on something Aeris couldn't see yet. The Cetra let out a small gasp, but kept quiet, since she wanted to see what was going on.

"Cloud" She whispered.

Cloud obviously had no knowledge of his girlfriend's presence being in the same area as him. His normally neat, spiky blonde hair now had muddy streaks in it and his body was frighteningly still. Aeris saw that his Ultima Weapon was in the sheath strapped to his back. The Ancient saw him shiver slightly, then regain his unmoving posture. After a while, deciding that she had watched him stand there long enough, she stepped out from behind the tree and approached her boyfriend.

"Cloud?" She asked quietly. "Cloud, what are you doing here?"

Upon hearing her words, Cloud spun around to face the flower merchant. Aeris was shocked to see that his usually tranquil Mako blue eyes were a menacing crimson red. The ex-Shinra soldier slowly unsheathed his sword from his back and held it out in front of him. The Cetra gave him a concerned look, and took a few steps back away from him.

"C-Cloud?" She stammered.

Cloud stared coldly at her, his hands still gripping his Ultima Weapon tightly; he seemed ready to attack at any second. Aeris glanced down at the ground in spite of the awkwardness and looked back up at Cloud. She was about to open her mouth to say something, but couldn't when he suddenly lunged forward and brought his sword down to strike her.

The Ancient yanked her Princess Guard up to defend herself just in time! Cloud's Ultima Weapon cut into her red metal staff as Aeris' mouth dropped open in shock at his action. She retracted her weapon, and carefully shoved him away from her; she quickly stepped further away from Cloud. The flower merchant held the rod in front of her, just in case her boyfriend was going to attack again.

"Cloud, what are you doing?!" She questioned.

He didn't answer; the ex-soldier only brought his sword up and again, pounced on his girlfriend. The attack was unexpected, so Aeris couldn't prepare herself. She was knocked onto the floor, her boyfriend's body harshly pinning her to the ground.

Aeris winced as her body fell, crying out in pain when her back slammed upon the ground. Her Princess Guard shook and wobbled in her shaky hand; Aeris held it tighter and brought it up to defend her face. As she tried to do so, a cold blade was pressed against her throat threateningly, and the Cetra froze. She glanced up and looked into the cool red eyes of Cloud.

"Stop this, Cloud. Please, let me up" She requested softly.

The blade of his Ultima Weapon pressed more tightly against Aeris' neck and she whimpered slightly. The flower merchant wanted to free herself from Cloud's entrapment; however, she didn't want to hurt her boyfriend in the process. She lay there, unmoving, her breath coming out in rapid gasps it hurt her throat to breathe.

"Cloud what's going on? Talk to me" She tried to reason.

Cloud let out a low growl, and Aeris silenced herself. The ex-soldier's gaze fell on his girlfriend's Princess Guard and he reached for the staff. Aeris stiffened, but let him take her weapon. He took it with one hand and inspected it carefully. After looking the rod over, Cloud flung it a few feet aside and turned his attention back to Aeris. His movements caused his Ultima Weapon to dig slightly more into her skin; she felt small trickles of liquid slowly drip down her neck, but she stayed still.

Surprisingly, his sword left her throat; Cloud set it down on the ground next to him. Instead, he gripped her chin roughly with his right hand and brought his face down, very closely to hers, until their noses were only an inch apart. For a second, Aeris thought he was going to spit in her face or something of the similar.

"The master requires your destruction." Cloud said in a quiet robotic voice, his first words to her since that morning.

"W-what?" Aeris stuttered.

"I am assigned to kill you." He told her unemotionally.

She shook her head slightly. "N-no, please don't"

Cloud's left hand traveled to his Ultima Weapon and he brought it over her head. He glared at the Cetra and his crimson eyes looked into her frightened green ones. Aeris shut her eyes and tried to turn her face away from her upcoming death, but Cloud's tight grip on her chin prevented her from doing so.

"Die." He remarked finally.

Tears spilled freely down Aeris' cheeks as she opened her eyes and waited for the Ultima Weapon to penetrate her tender throat. Before he did anything else, Cloud leaned down and brought his lips to hers, kissing her harshly.

The kiss of death She thought dazedly as his head rose away from hers. Aeris looked at him in fear and watched as Cloud brought his sword down toward her head.

"_NO! This is not your time to die!_" A voice from inside the Ancient's body screamed at her.

Newfound strength and determination surged through Aeris. She twisted her body from side to side and finally broke free of his grasp on her chin. The Cetra pushed Cloud up away from her with a groan and jumped up. She dashed to her Princess Guard and grabbed it up from the ground, then whirled around to face Cloud. To her surprise, her boyfriend was looking at her, his face twisted up in a strange expression and his hands were gripping the sides of his head. Cloud glanced at her with pain-filled eyes.

"G-go" He squeezed out. Aeris stood still, unsure of what to do. "Go, now!" He ordered.

The Cetra turned and ran; before she left the area, she turned her head around and gave him one last look. Cloud was on his knees, his hands still holding onto his head. Aeris bit her lip and hoped that running away from him was the right thing to do.

"S-stay here!" She yelled to him. "I-I'll go get help for you!"

The Cetra ran as fast as she could, avoiding all the monsters. She gasped when she finally reached the entrance of the Sleeping Forest, and staggered to her chocobo, Princess Guard still in her hand. The flower merchant touched the base of her neck gently; when her fingers came away, she saw a little bit of blood. Aeris bent down and wiped it away in the cold white snow, then grasped Baby's reins and mounted the golden feathered creature, urging Baby to run by thumping her feet against her side.

"Waaaaaaaark!" The chocobo squawked and dashed off, heading northwest without Aeris even telling her to.

The flower merchant and Baby arrived at Icicle Inn shortly after leaving the Sleeping Forest. Aeris jumped off her chocobo and ran into her house. She stalked to the kitchen, and grabbed a face towel. Moistening it under the sink and dabbing it on her neck, she went up to her room, threw her staff on the floor and frantically searched for her PHS. When she found it, the Cetra activated the device.

"Hello?" A voice said from the other end of the communicator.

"Y-Yuffie?!" Aeris asked anxiously.

"Hey Aeris! How are ya doing?" The teenage girl's voice sounded delightful to receive a call from her 'sister'.

"Yuff, I know this might sound like a bother, but can you and Vincent please come over here to Icicle Inn right away?!" The flower merchant pleaded.

"Um, sure, I guess. I have to ask Vince first and we gotta call Cid. Wait a minute, what's wrong, Aeris? Are you okay?" Yuffie asked with concern.

"I-I can't explain right now" The Ancient stuttered in a un-Aeris like way. "Please, come here as soon as you can!"

"All right! Be over in a few!" The young ninja hung up.

Aeris clicked off her PHS and paced nervously in her room. Unable to stand the tension any longer, she tossed the PHS onto her bed and ran downstairs. The Cetra buttoned up her purple overcoat and went outside to retrieve her chocobo. She brought Baby into the garden and let her run loose, as usual. Aeris shut the door to the backyard and walked out of Icicle Inn, waiting the arrival of her two close friends.

A few minutes later, the flower merchant looked up and spotted the brownish gray coat of paint of the airship in the distance. She smiled shakily and ran toward the Highwind, her hair flowing wildly in the icy breeze. The Cetra stopped when she was a few yards away from the airship, and patiently waited for Cid's pilot to land the Highwind and let her friends out.

"Aeris!" She suddenly heard someone cry out.

The auburn hair woman glanced up in the direction of the yell and saw Yuffie Kisaragi sliding down a long rope from the balcony of the Highwind. The young teenager's short black hair whipped upwards as she went down and down, jumping off the rope when she was a few feet from the ground. Yuffie ran to Aeris and gave her a friendly hug, a bright smile on her face. The Ancient could only manage a stiff smile back.

"Hi!" The ninja said excitedly. Seeing Aeris' serious expression, Yuffie's smile dropped and she immediately was worried. She put an arm around the shoulder of her sister and started back toward her and Cloud's house in Icicle Inn.

"What's the matter?" She asked curiously. Then, she suddenly noticed the cut on Aeris' throat and gasped. "What happened to you? Why is your neck bleeding?!"

"I'm still bleeding?" Aeris asked dizzily.

Yuffie threw her a questioning look. "Oh, i-it was Cloud," The Cetra informed her in a quiet voice. "Something's wrong with him"

"Did he go crazy or something?" Someone asked from behind.

The girls turned around and saw Vincent Valentine.

"Ah, sorry I forgot to wait for ya, Vince." Yuffie apologized with a sheepish smile.

"It's okay." He replied. "Hey Aeris. Yuffie told me you sounded kind of stressed over the PHS anything wrong?"

Aeris sighed as she frowned with worry. "Cloud's gone This morning, after I went to his room to wake him up for the day, Cloud seemed pretty normal. But then I tried to find him after I finished cooking breakfast; I hadn't seen him since the morning in his room."

Yuffie and her boyfriend nodded as the three continued walking in unison to Icicle Inn.

"I looked in Cloud's room, and it was completely wrecked; things were thrown all over the place. I cleaned up some of the mess, then noticed the open window. I was closing it, but saw footprints outside. Naturally, I assumed they probably belonged to Cloud.

"After getting my Princess Guard and Mystile armor, I got Baby and followed the tracks. They lead southeast, around the mountain, to the Sleeping Forest. I left Baby outside and went into the forest. I crossed a few scenes, then finally saw Cloud in the middle of an open clearing.

"I hid behind a tree for a few minutes; I wasn't sure what he was doing there, in the middle of nowhere. Cloud just stood there for a while, his Ultima Weapon was with him, strapped onto his back and everything. I got tired of waiting, stepped out from behind the tree and asked what he was doing there. Cloud turned around when he heard me. Strangely, his eyes were a blood red color instead of his normal blue."

Vincent looked uncomfortably away at the 'red eye' remark. Aeris shivered as she remembered the cold unwavering glare that her boyfriend had given her in the forest.

She continued, "He just glared at me for a moment and then he, he a-attacked me"

"What!!" Yuffie blurted out. "How dare he do such a thing! I swear, when I see him again, I'm gonna kick his little-"

The Cetra held up a hand to silence her. Yuffie flushed at her outburst and quieted herself, urging Aeris with her hands to finish the story.

"So, Cloud tried to strike me and I defended myself with my Princess Guard right before he hit me. I shoved him away and asked what he was doing. Cloud didn't say anything, he just unexpectedly pounced on me and knocked us both to the ground."

Yuffie frowned at the last sentence and pinched her lips tightly together in order not to comment.

"I-I tried to reach my weapon and get him off of me, but he put the bladed side of his Ultima Weapon at the base of my throat, so I didn't dare to move. Cloud took my weapon afterwards and he cut me accidentally when he tossed the Princess Guard away. Then, he brought his face close to mine and said, 'The master requires your destruction.' I don't know what he meant by that, so I asked, 'What?' But all that Cloud told me was, 'I am assigned to kill you,' and 'Die.'" Aeris let out a sob as she said that.

Her ninja friend was steaming by now. Right before Yuffie could open her mouth to say anything, Aeris concluded her story.

"Cloud raised his sword above my head; he was about to bring it down to kill me, when all of a sudden, he kissed me," Aeris gently touched her lips with two dainty fingers.

"Cloud was going to strike me, but a voice inside me commanded for me not to die. I pushed him up off of me and grabbed my Princess Guard. When I turned back to face him, Cloud had fallen to his knees and his hands were holding his head. He looked at me and told me to go, to leave him there. I didn't move at first, but then he yelled at me to go. I told him to stay there while I got help, and I ran out of the Sleeping Forest."

Aeris sighed heavily. "That's it"

Beside her, Yuffie's fists were clenched tightly.

"What the hell is Cloud's problem?" She retorted with gritted teeth. "What, did he smoke too much cocaine this morning?!"

"Yuffie" Aeris said quietly.

"Hmmm Aeris, I might know what had happened to Cloud" Vincent told her thoughtfully.

"What?" She stopped and turned to her friend. "Tell me!" She demanded.

"Back when I was a Turk, it was rumored that regular Shinra soldiers as well as members of SOLDIER, had something injected into their heads" He gave the Cetra a guilty look. "This occurred before Mako was discovered."

"Injected? With what?" Aeris mused.

"There was this kind of strange device that had just been created. I believe it had a sort of mind-controlling power."

"M-mind control?" Yuffie shivered slightly. "That's creepy"

The flower merchant frowned. "So you're saying that Cloud might have some kind of mind-controlling object in his head?!"

Vincent nodded. "Right. I'm not a hundred percent sure, but I think that's most likely the cause of his previous actions."

"W-wait a minute, if Cloud does have that thing injected inside him, then why did it take so long to work?" Aeris put her hands on her

hips. "Why didn't we see him do something earlier? Why today?"

"Because there is one object you must use to control each individual person injected with the device," He answered matter-of-factly. "Maybe someone found it and is now using Cloud."

"That had ****better**** be the reason Cloud's acting all crazy!" The young ninja said angrily.

Her sister sighed and told her friends, "I think we'd better go get him really soon, now if possible."

"Definitely!" Yuffie confirmed. "Let's go now!"

"Um, did you bring Sunnie with you?" Aeris asked. "The Highwind can't get us directly to the back of the Sleeping Forest. Unless you have a Lunar Harp, we can't all get in the front of the forest from Bone Village. I can only protect you both from going to sleep if we go from behind. Oh, and also, I think you and Vincent will need your weapons"

The Asian teenager winked. "Sunnie's in the portable chocobo stable right now. Hold on, I'll go tell for Cid to drop him and our weapons down!"

She ran back to the huge airship and yelled, "HEY CID! LET SUNNIE DOWN HERE! AND GIVE US OUR WEAPONS TOO!"

The pilot's face appeared from above, looking down at his friends from the balcony of the Highwind. He looked a bit ticked off as he flicked his cigarette and little clumps of ash fell to the ground, nearby the area where Yuffie was standing; she glared disapprovingly at him.

"EWW! DON'T INFECT ME WITH YOUR DISGUSTING SMOKEY ASH!" She shrieked.

Cid Highwind sneered. "@\$%#! WHY THE HELL DIDN'T YOU BRING HIM AND YOUR WEAPONS WITH YOU IN THE FIRST PLACE?! AH, NEVER MIND, WAIT A MINUTE!"

A few seconds later, the three below heard a, "Wark!" The teenage ninja glanced up and saw her young chocobo hopping down the side of the airship, his golden feathers getting ruffled by the rush of the breeze he caused. He bounded to the floor and immediately ran to Yuffie, squawking excitedly at her. Yuffie's Conformer and Vincent's Death Penalty were strapped to Sunnie's saddle.

"Hey fella!" The girl giggled. She untied her weapon from her chocobo, handed the rifle to her boyfriend and hopped onto her chocobo; Vincent gently stroked Sunnie's feathers and got on behind his girlfriend.

"Uh, I need to get my Princess Guard and Baby" Aeris flushed slightly. "I let her run around in the garden about fifteen minutes ago, after the incident with Cloud, and my weapon is on my bed. Be right back!"

She rushed back to her birthplace and went to her room upstairs

again. She grabbed her staff, ran downstairs and opened the door to her garden. The flower merchant peered in and whistled.

"Baby! Come here please!" She called out.

Shortly after she said that, her chocobo darted to her from behind a few tall shrubs. Aeris smiled stiffly at Baby and took her reins; she led her out of the garden and shut the wooden door closed tightly. The Cetra got onto her chocobo and ran back to her friends.

The three riders quickly sprinted to the Sleeping Forest, Aeris lagging behind a little. She still shuddered at what had previously happened. What if Cloud succeeded in killing her this time?

Is twenty-two too young of an age to die? She wondered. _Ack, I shouldn't worry about dyingmy friends are with me this time_

Still, she worried. And the nervousness didn't disappear as the trio finally arrived at the Sleeping Forest. Aeris slowly got off of Baby and looked nervously at the woodsy area. A comforting hand on her shoulder interrupted her; she turned around and saw Yuffie.

"It's okaywe'll get Cloud to snap out of it." The teenager assured.

The Cetra sighed and replied, "I hope so."

She took a deep breath and walked past into the entrance of the forest. After fighting a few weak monsters, the three appeared at the clearing where Aeris had seen Cloud earlier. Only, this time, no one was there Aeris tilted her head to one side in confusion.

"He was here before," She said firmly to her friends. The flower merchant started walking around the area and inspecting it. Yuffie and Vincent followed her lead and searched their surroundings as well. Suddenly, Vincent spotted a strange-looking plant. He tried to pull it from the ground for a closer look, but instead of the plant breaking away from its roots, a hidden passage revealed from behind a thick, twisty shroud of tree branches.

The black hair man turned his head and yelled, "Aeris, Yuffie! Come here; I think I found something"

The girls ran to his side and gasped at the new path. Then Yuffie's expression hardened and she held onto her Conformer tightly. Her gaze fell to the Imperial Guard bangles on her wrists, then glanced up again; her boyfriend loaded up his gun and checked his Escort Guard. Aeris swallowed hard and gripped her Princess Guard, her knuckles growing a pale shade of white. The companions glanced at each other and nodded. The Cetra started foreword and walked slowly down the passage, her eyes darting everywhere at the new environment around her, the Princess Guard in front of her, tucked securely in her hands.

After she felt like she had been walking for twenty minutes or so, Aeris and her allies finally reached the end of the secret passage, and the entrance of a new room. The green area was covered in tall

grass and big, leafy trees; there wasn't anyone in there either. Aeris noticed a strange musty smell as she approached one end of the room. She stepped further into it with caution, and gestured for Yuffie and Vincent to follow her.

The Ancient turned around to face her friends. "Um, I guess no one's here. I wonder where Cloud-"

She was interrupted when a hard blow connected with the back of her head. Aeris fell forward from the impact and rubbed her head, her staff making a loud "thud!" as it dropped to the dirt floor. She winced and turned around to see who had attacked her.

It was Cloud. The Cetra's mouth dropped open.

"Cloud" She whispered.

His eyes were still glowing blood red as he stared silently at his girlfriend. Aeris met his gaze and held it, despite the queasiness creeping up her stomach. Cloud broke the look after a while and unsheathed his Ultima Weapon from behind him, holding it out in a threatening arc. Yuffie gave him an angry glare and waved her Conformer at the ex-Shinra soldier.

"Damn it, Cloud! Get a hold of yourself!" The young girl ordered.

"We're not going to fight you, unless you make the first move." Vincent informed, cocking back his Death Penalty.

Cloud stayed silent, and then he suddenly leaped forward and tried to strike Aeris with his giant sword. She gritted her teeth, grabbed the Princess Guard from the ground and blocked the attack with her staff. The two were locked in an intimate struggle, neither of the couple budging away from each other. Yuffie started to run forward and help out her friend, but Vincent shook his head and held her back.

"It wouldn't be wise to get into the middle of it" He told her.

"Vince, I can't stand by and watch this happen! We gotta do something!" The young ninja's forest green eyes shone with unshed tears as she watched her sister with the ex-soldier, but she listened to her boyfriend and didn't move from her spot.

"Cloud, don't let that thing control you!" Aeris urged. "You're stronger than that device, I know it! Please, break free from it!"

"Shut up you little tramp!" A voice harshly screamed from the side. The Cetra turned her head and saw a figure stalk slowly toward the couple. Cloud pushed her a few feet away from him upon seeing the person arrive, and he rushed over to him/her.

"Who are you?" Aeris asked.

"You know me, Gainsborough." The figure snarled and finally stopped at the shining rays of sunshine, revealing itself to the trio ahead.

"_Tifa?!_" Aeris shrieked in surprise.

Tifa Lockheart smiled smugly at the shocked look on the Cetra's face and she walked to her, pausing when she and Aeris were only a feet apart. The taunting woman twirled her black hair around a single finger and a devilish grin spread across her lips.

"That's my name, don't wear it out." She replied.

Aeris frowned. "What business do you have here? Did you follow us? If not, what are you doing here?"

"Hell no, I did not trail behind you three like some kind of sick puppy," Tifa rolled her eyes.

The flower merchant narrowed her eyes and thought, _A sick puppy, that's a perfect description of you, Tifa._ She giggled at that statement, but then silently scolded herself for thinking such a mean remark.

Aeris' attention went back to Tifa as she watched the woman turn to Cloud and smiled seductively at him. She kneaded her hand through his hair, letting her fingers linger on his long blonde bangs, placing a sloppy kiss on his cheek after doing so while the Cetra glared at her. The former Shinra soldier stood still, not objecting to what his ex-childhood friend was doing to him. All of a sudden, Tifa fished out a small device from the pocket of her short shorts, and tauntingly waved it in front of Aeris.

"Looking for this?" The ex-AVALANCHE member gloated.

"What's that, Lockheart?" Yuffie asked coldly.

"I wasn't asking you, little girl," Tifa sneered.

The ninja fumed. "I bet you won't be calling me 'little' after I shove my Conformer up your-"

Aeris turned around and smiled weakly at the teenager. "Yuff, thanks for the defense, but I can handle her."

Her sister nodded. "Okay, go get her, sis!"

"'Sis'?" Tifa laughed evilly. "Give me a break, I thought you out-lived Barbie dolls and pretend relatives, Aeris."

As soon as she finished saying that, Aeris jumped foreword and swung her Princess Guard fiercely, the pointed end of the staff hitting Tifa squarely on the side of her face.

"You little bitch!!" Tifa screeched, holding her cheek with one hand. She pointed to Aeris, Yuffie, and Vincent, and ordered, "Kill them, Cloud!"

Cloud slowly nodded his head and obliged. He stepped toward Aeris, but Yuffie distracted the man when she cast "Fire" on him, and she suddenly became his new target. The young ninja saw the ex-Shinra turn to her, and she grabbed Vincent's arm. The two of them ran west, Cloud following close behind.

"Aeris, Vince and I will fight Cloud! Take care of Tifa and be careful!" Yuffie yelled breathlessly at the Cetra.

The flower merchant nodded, even though her sister was out of sight. She turned to Tifa and narrowed her emerald green eyes.

"Where did you get that?" Aeris asked.

"Although it's none of your business, I suppose it wouldn't hurt for you to know before you die," Her enemy answered with an unenthusiastic yawn, tossing her dark hair back snottily.

Aeris let out a low growl. "Spare me the chit-chat."

"Don't pressure me, brat." Tifa hissed. The Cetra bit her lip irritably.

"So anyways, my mistress knew about stupid President Shinra and his controlling device. He never used these himself, once Mako was discovered. Of course, Hojo, being the crazy scientist he is," She paused and rolled her eyes. "He wanted to experiment with all the soldiers and members of SOLDIER. But, President Shinra forbid anyone to do anything with the devices, and concentrate on developing crap with Mako."

"Only the older soldiers were injected with it?" Aeris questioned, holding her staff in an attack-ready position.

"Yes, genius." Tifa taunted. "That damned Mako took up everyone's mind and time, so soon those devices were forgotten; instead, everything was infused with Mako!"

She held the controlling device to her huge chest, and grinned at Aeris. "At least I still have one. And conveniently, my mistress found the device that controlled **Cloud**!"

Tifa laughed wickedly. Aeris gripped her rod tightly and said to her opponent, "How can you stand there and laugh like that?! I can't believe you would do this to Cloud; he was your friend!"

"Shut the hell up! You, of all people, should keep quiet! I had to resort to this only because you stole my boyfriend!" The woman looked furiously at the Ancient.

Through with being nice, Aeris retorted, "Well, I guess Cloud has really good taste in whom he chose for his girlfriend, hmm?"

_Hope that wasn't too mean _The flower girl thought.

Tifa snarled at her remark, but held onto her pride and held up her fists menacingly. "Your move, wench."

Aeris frowned and walked a few steps closer to Tifa. The Ancient faked a couple of movements, then leapt at the black-haired woman and smacked her across the shoulder and chest. Her enemy snarled and unmercifully grabbed Aeris' long silky auburn hair, yanking her roughly and kicking the back of the flower merchant's knees.

The Cetra grimaced in discomfort, but refused to give in and show any

pain. She elbowed the woman behind her and raked the side of her tan boots against Tifa's shins. Her fingers jabbed the girl in the eyes, and she screamed, finally letting go of Aeris' hair. The Ancient moved away from her, and her Princess Guard began levitating in the air as the flower merchant closed her eyes and concentrated on chanting the spell. She raised her arms over her head, then thrust them foreword and cast, "Quadra Magic-Freeze!"

A huge block of ice upon Tifa's shoulder; the next two slammed against her chest and the last one hit her on the head. She stumbled to one knee and got up again to attack Aeris. However, the Cetra was already prepared. Her hands quickly swung the staff at Tifa and harshly hit her body four times, thanks to the Double Cut Materia.

The woman fell to the ground when Aeris accidentally struck her head the next time she had hit her. The flower merchant didn't want to kill Tifa, so she left two Hi-Potions on the ground nearby. Then, she plucked the controlling device from Tifa's pocket and inspected it carefully.

"For a little thing, you sure are causing an awful lot of trouble" Aeris murmured to the object in her grasp.

She picked up her staff, raised it over her head and smashed the tiny object. Not looking back, she ran off westward to find Cloud, Yuffie, and Vincent.

By the time she arrived to the room where her friends had been fighting in, the first thing Aeris saw was Yuffie and Vincent propping an unmoving Cloud up against a big gray rock. She also spotted a slightly bloodstained Conformer lying nearby Yuffie. Vincent leaned the Ultima Weapon next to him as a small trail of blood was leaking down Cloud's forehead. Yuffie looked guiltily at the ex-Shinra and cast "Cure" on him, the wound closing up after she did so.

Cloud's eyes suddenly shot open and his hands darted to his sword, jumping up as a shocked Yuffie and Vincent stepped back from him. Yuffie glanced worriedly at Cloud, and her boyfriend held onto her, protectively. The former soldier's crimson pupils traveled to Aeris and he looked intensely into her nervous emerald green eyes.

_What do I do now? Should I fight him? _The Cetra pondered. _Can I really fight against someone that I adore?_

__The frightening thought of her own boyfriend being her opponent, made Aeris shiver slightly. But then, Aeris finally made her decision. She slowly leaned toward the ground and set her Princess Guard on the floor, Cloud's eyes following her while she was putting it down. The Ancient swallowed hard as she carefully approached her boyfriend, cautiously watching his Ultima Weapon in his hands.

If what I'm about to do is a mistake and I should die, at least it'll be by the hands of my beloved not like the time Sephiroth killed me She shivered at the thought of the silver haired man whom had murdered her not too long ago.

The flower merchant clutched a little of her hair in one hand nervously, and walked toward Cloud. His form stiffened even more as

his girlfriend got closer to him; he narrowed his blood red eyes in suspicion. Aeris stopped a few inches in front of him as Cloud raised his sword over his shoulder. She gathered up her courage and closed the distance between their bodies.

The Ancient looked up at him bravely and said, "I love you, Cloud."

Aeris quickly slipped her arms around his neck, closed her eyes and pressed her lips firmly to his. For a moment, Cloud tensed up, then relaxed and responded fiercely to her kiss, his hand gently caressing his girlfriend's soft hair. The Ultima Weapon fell from his grasp and Yuffie snatched it up. Aeris and Cloud were locked in a passionate embrace for a while, but then the blonde hair young man began to tremble slightly. The Cetra broke away from him and gasped as he suddenly collapsed; she caught him in her arms right before he fell to the floor.

Bright lightloud voices

__ Cloud blinked his eyes open and he saw a fuzzy picture in front of him. He tried to shake the haziness away, but it made his head hurt. The ex-Shinra moaned in pain and rubbed his eyes instead, as a warm, slender hand gently rested on his forehead. The shape he saw slowly turned into Aeris and the smaller shadows beside her were really Yuffie, Vincent, and Cid.

"Uhhhh" He groaned. "A-Aeris? I-is that you?"

The Cetra nodded and smiled at her boyfriend, then turned to Cid and pointed at his cigarette. The pilot grumbled, but tossed the small white cylinder into the trash.

"Hey Cloud," Aeris said softly. "Are you feeling alright?"

"Head hurts" The ex-Shinra grimaced.

He blinked and looked up, suddenly noticing a thin scar on the flower merchant's neck. Cloud pointed to it and asked, "How did you get that?"

His girlfriend bit her lip and didn't answer for a moment; neither did the others.

"Let's not worry about me right now," She said finally. "I'll tell you later. Do you feel okay?"

"I want to sleep for a while," The former soldier answered.

Aeris nodded. "Okay, we'll leave you alone."

Yuffie cleared her throat. "Um, I think Vince and I need to go back to Wutai" She gave her 'sister' an apologetic look.

"Shera's probably wondering where I am. Women always wanna know where we are." Cid shook his head.

"Hey, I resent that!" The young ninja said to him.

Cid rolled his eyes. "Well, @\$% it! Let's just go."

"Bye Aeris, Cloud," Yuffie gave the Ancient a hug. "See ya next time, k?"

"Sure." Her friend replied.

"Hope you feel better, Cloud." Vincent said. Cloud was already asleep.

"Thanks everyone." Aeris told her friends as they waved and left the room. She glanced down at Cloud and smiled. The flower merchant leaned down and kissed him softly on the forehead.

"Get well soon, Cloud," She whispered. Aeris pulled his blanket up to his chin, covering practically his whole body. She walked to the door and stopped for a second. The Cetra turned around and looked at him one more time, before she went out of his room, and shut the door quietly behind her.

**** A couple of hours later, Aeris opened the door quietly and stepped into her boyfriend's room, a small tray of food and Jasmine tea in her hand. Her silky brown hair had gotten stringy after the incident she had gone through earlier. The Cetra brushed it away quickly, and she turned her back to shut the door.

"Aeris?" A voice called from behind.

She raised an eyebrow and turned around. "Cloud? You're up already?"

The ex-Shinra sat limply on his bed; a cloudy haze of deep thought and distresses occupying his now normal Mako blue eyes. His girlfriend approached him and set the tray down on his nightstand, looking at him worriedly.

"What did I do?" Cloud whispered, not really directing the question to anyone in particular.

"W-what do you mean, Cloud?" Aeris asked, perhaps stupidly.

"I tried to kill you?" Her boyfriend gripped the sides of his head, and groaned as a spasm of pain hit him.

The flower merchant bit her lip. "Um, why don't you go back to sleep"

His hand grasped her arm and he choked out hoarsely, "Tell me, Aeris. I can't rest till I fully know what happened. I only remember a little bit"

She sighed and next to him on one side of the bed. "What do you remember?"

"Something or someone in my head called me to them, and I followed

the message to the Sleeping Forest," He told her, his eyes shut tightly. "Um, I remember ending up in a weird room, then waiting there a long time, before you showed up."

Cloud glanced up at her with an intensely serious expression on his face. "I attacked you, didn't I? I hurt you with my sword, caused you to shed blood"

"No, don't say that it wasn't your fault" Aeris denied, shaking her head as a small glimmer of tears started to fill her eyes.

"Tell me the truth!" Her boyfriend demanded. "I-hurt-you, yes or no?"

"Physically or emotionally?" She stalled.

"Both."

"Cloud, you really shouldn't do this to yourself" Aeris persisted.

"I have to know, Aeris. Tell me, please," He pleaded.

"Yes, you hurt me," She admitted with a heavy sigh. "But it really wasn't your fault-! It was just Tifa, manipulating your mind"

"Like Sephiroth" He muttered angrily.

"I guess so" The Ancient answered timidly.

"I'm really sorry," Cloud apologized and wrapped his arms around her in a warm hug.

"Cloud, really, it's okay," Aeris smiled weakly. "I'm fine now"

"Damn Tifa," He grumbled darkly. "Why would she do something stupid like that?"

"Uh, remember Gold Saucer? On your birthday?" His girlfriend reminded.

(Note: that was a reference to Once Interrupted by Fireworks)

"Ugh," Cloud groaned. "I always thought she was good with not holding grudges"

"People change." She replied simply.

"Well, I'm not gonna let her get to me anymore," The ex-Shinra said, determination showing in his eyes.

Aeris smiled.

"Eat this, drink your tea, and go back to sleep, okay?" She told him, picking up the tray and setting it on his lap.

"Thanks," Cloud said with a grin.

"Careful not to get your blanket messy," The flower merchant

chuckled.

"But if I did, then you'd have to come in here and clean it! And then I'd have your company. I don't see that as a bad thing" He teased.

"Whatever, I'll come back soon, okay? If you don't go to sleep, I'll cast Sleepel on you myself." Aeris threatened lightly with a laugh.

"Bye" Cloud said solemnly.

"See ya later" She replied, and walked out of the room.

The former soldier smiled at her retreating figure, then picked up the cup of tea and drank the soothing liquid. All through the meal, his mind was thinking of Aeris and he pondered

_I love Aeris a lot _Cloud thought to himself. _Are we ready to take the next step? _

"As soon as Aeris lets me leave the house, I'll go out and buy a ring" The young man decided quietly, and went back to his meal with a smile.

Hope she won't say no, or get scared off One side of his mind lingered, and Cloud quickly rejected the thought.*****

****Epilogue****

***** "You failed," A slender figure boomed.

Tifa winced at the anger and bitterness dripping in the person's voice. The dark hair woman looked up and scrunched up her face, trying to think of something to say in her own defense.

"YES OR NO?!" The figure demanded to know.

"Y-yes, I'm sorry," Tifa said in a shaky voice. "But don't worry, I'll get them next time, I swear it!"

"Bull," The person said. "Who defeated you, hmm? I thought you claimed to be the strongest fighter out of the eight of you whom defeated him. So you were lying?" A lazy, seductive smile slowly spread over the figure's face.

"N-no, of course not!" Tifa declared.

"Who was it? Not that Cetra, I hope." The figure laughed.

Tifa looked down in shame. "Y-yes, unfortunately, it ****was**** her"

Her prosecutor yawned at her. "I'm getting bored, Ms. Lockheart. Destroy the Ancient, or else," That was said with a snarl.

The figure hissed at Tifa when she didn't answer.
"Understood?!"

"Yes, Sinetra." Tifa obliged quietly.

Sinetra tossed back her head in annoyance and threatened, "I would hate to be you if you happen to fail next time"

Tifa shivered and nodded. "Yes, of course"

"Our next destination is Icicle Inn," Sinetra told her. "Tell the others to prepare the airship and don't forget about the double"

The silver and black hair woman flipped her hair over her shoulder and stood up from her seat. She glared at Tifa one last time, and then walked through the wall and out of the dark room. Tifa snarled quietly at her after she left, and quickly exited the room and went about her assignment.

****To be continued****

****Author's Note:**** Thanks for reading my story! I hope that you all like the description so far, of the mysterious person whom is after Aeris. The next story will conclude this little series I've written, enjoy the next fic!

With love for my fans,

Tiger5913

End
file.